



LA CIRCULATION DES PERSONNES CABARET DANCERS'S TRANSNATIONALITY

Janine Dahinden

Author

Janine Dahinden is professor of transnational studies at the University of Neuchâtel. She specializes on issues on mobility, migration, transnationalism, ethnicity, social networks, culture and gender. Her research is transdisciplinary and combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Her regional specialization is Kosova, Albania and Switzerland.

janine.dahinden@unine.ch

© 2010 by the author

ISSN : 1662-744X



Contact:

MAPS - Maison d'analyse des processus sociaux
Faubourg de l'Hôpital 27
CH - 2000 Neuchâtel
Tél. +41 32 718 39 34
www2.unine.ch/maps
maps.info@unine.ch

Abstract

Cabaret dancers working in night clubs in Switzerland represent a heterogeneous group that embodies a particular form of female mobility. Some of them are genuinely “world travelers”: they work in erotic clubs in Switzerland, Japan, or Lebanon, go home regularly to be with their children or their families, or continue their education. In this article, I am interested in understanding the factors influencing the specific transnational formation of cabaret dancers. Analysis of interviews with cabaret dancers reveals that their specific form of transnationality is the result of the transnational nature of the sex industry, the women’s ability to form “weak” ties with a range of local actors, their own resourcefulness in terms of mobility, and the opportunity structure of the local context in Switzerland. Their transnational formation, which relies highly on mobility and a specific “knowledge of how to move,” is also related to their activities as sex workers in the context of (globally and locally) constructed ideas about ethnicity and sexuality

Keywords:

Transnationality
cabaret dancers
mobility
migration
sex

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Michel Peraldi who invited me to present a first version of this paper (in French) at the Conference *Routes, Voyages et Circulations au féminin entre Afrique et Méditerranée*, organized by the Centre Jacques Berque in Rabat, Maroc. Many thanks also to Thomas Faist and Rainer Bauböck who gave me the opportunity to present a second version of the paper at the conference *Diaspora and Transnationalism. Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges. A joint conference of the IMISCOE network of excellence and the European University Institute*, Florence. Finally, many thanks to Romaric Thiévent for his important and helpful comments, which have certainly enhanced this text, as well as to Fabienne Stants who was a help in conducting and coordinating the research.

Funding

This study was supported by the FIZ - Women’s Information Center for Women from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe in Zurich, Switzerland.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cabaret – the word evokes pictures of Paris, the Belle Époque after the opening of the famous *Moulin Rouge* in 1889, glamorous women in glittering costumes moving to the rhythm of the music. Anyone expecting a dazzling spectacle like this would certainly be very disappointed by a visit to a cabaret in Switzerland, for nowadays they bear no resemblance to this image. When the first cabarets in Switzerland opened toward the end of the 1920s, the dancers belonged to foreign musical groups touring the main cities. They traveled with a large entourage, as well as big trunks to transport their wardrobes for the variety shows. In those days, the dancers' performances in Switzerland were also highly artistic. Now the live musicians have disappeared, replaced by digital recordings. The shows presented by the dancers today last only a few minutes; the women still dance to music, but the sexual-erotic aspects are always the most important: the whole point is for them to get their scanty clothing off as quickly as possible.

This evolution in the show itself is paralleled by another trend: Nowadays, no Swiss nationals dance in the 350 Swiss cabarets; the dancers are exclusively migrant women. Around 6000 cabaret dancers enter (and leave) the country each year. In the 1980s, half the dancers in Switzerland came from countries in Western Europe; by 2005 this number was down to 2%. Today, the young women we find in cabarets come mainly from Eastern Europe (about three-quarters) and some from Central or South America, and Asia. These cabaret dancers represent a heterogeneous group that embodies a particular form of female mobility. Some of them are genuinely "world travelers": they work in erotic clubs in Switzerland, Japan, or Lebanon, go home regularly to be with their children or their families, or continue their education. At first glance, it seems as if these cabaret dancers would be transnational agents, moving back and forth between different places, developing transnational networks and field. However, it is interesting to note that in the international literature female migrants who sell sexual or erotic services – and cabaret dancers are included in this category – are generally absent from transnational studies, but they do appear in studies examining the trafficking of women in the context of criminological or feminist research (critically Agustin 2006; Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2004; Thorbek 2002). In other words, mobile women working in the sex industry are not often seen as transnational migrants, they are – without further reflection – mainly seen as victims of trafficking and not perceived as transnational actors equipped with *agency* and capable of *reflexivity*.

The aim of this article is to show that cabaret dancers develop a specific form of transnationality; I maintain that their specific transnational formation is the result of the transnational nature of the sex industry, the women's ability to form "weak" ties with a range of local actors, their own resourcefulness in terms of mobility, and the opportunity structure of the local context in Switzerland. Furthermore, their transnational formation is also related to their activities as sex workers in the context of (globally and locally) constructed ideas about sexuality and gender. Concretely in this article, I am interested in understanding the factors influencing the development of their specific transnationality. Transnationality is today central to understanding and explaining practices taking place across national borders. With regard to migration, some authors have theorized the complexity of transnational processes, focusing either on established migrants settled in the host countries (among others, Faist 2000; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992) or on people with a continuous form of circular mobility (for instance, Tarrius 2002). For the purposes of this article, I attempt to bring together these different ideas: my argument is that combining these ideas about the different forms of transnationality is epistemologically fruitful to understand the specific transnational formation of cabaret dancers. As

we will see, mobility is a main feature of transnationality of the dancers; but to be able to continue to circulate, the cabaret dancers need to establish to a certain degree of local bridges in Switzerland. The article is based on a study of 70 interviews with cabaret dancers in Switzerland and with 30 key persons from the federal and cantonal authorities, employment agencies, and night club owners (see Dahinden and Stants 2006).

In the first section of the article, the epistemological point of view for theorizing cabaret dancers will be developed, and the main ideas of the transnationality literature are introduced. Afterward, a short description of the methodology of the study is presented. The following paragraphs that are in the core of the article discuss the transnational morphology of the dancers. In the concluding remarks, some reflections of more theoretical nature are developed to show the contribution of this case study for the global transnationality debates.

2. THEORETICAL PREMISES

2.1. Cabaret dancers as migrant sex workers with agency

An analysis of the situation of the cabaret dancers can be done in different theoretical lines: First, cabaret dancers can be conceptualized as *working migrants*, which allows us to apply the theoretical ideas out of migration research. More specifically and secondly, cabaret dancers are *women* migrants. A set of authors have not only convincingly brought to light that and how migration processes are gendered with regard their symbolic and normative dimensions but also concerning structural and socioeconomic aspects and identity formations (Donato et al. 2006; Kofman 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Lately, much has been said about the feminization of migration flows, and an increased demand for women migrant workers on the global market has been observed, due to postindustrial economic restructuring processes and also due the developments in postcommunist societies since 1989. These and other processes culminates in more women migrants finding their way into factories, public services, domestic work and (Morokvasic 2003; Sassen 2003; Hochschild 2002) – and perhaps more significantly – also in the sex industry (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Agustin 2007). This set of analysis is helpful in understanding the transnational formations of cabaret dancers.

But cabaret dancers are not only *female working* migrants, they are also employed in a specific milieu –the sex industry. The sex industry covers all services of an erotic sexual nature offered on a commercial basis. These type of services includes not only prostitution, but also massage parlors, dating bars, escort services, night clubs, table dancing, lap dancing, or other forms of dancing, and erotic phone services, films and videos, among others. It need hardly be said that scientific analysis in this field faces specific problems, because it is surrounded by ambivalence of one kind or another dictated by moral imperatives and the subject of sexuality contributes greatly to the many ambivalences running through this debate (Chancer 1993). Is working in the sex industry to be considered as “voluntary or forced”? Why is it that often migrants selling sex are presented as doing it “involuntary” and forced by traffickers, while western prostitutes or – sex workers – are presented as self-employed and liberated? Or, how do we handle the distance between object and subject from a scientific point of view, given that it would be difficult to combine participatory observation with an academic career built on this theme? This is quite apart from the fact that campaigns for or against prostitution, pornography, or commercialized sex in general have been around for a long time, which does not facilitate research in this field.

Foucault (1977, 1978) has shown that not only is sexuality set in a microphysics of power but that it sits at the junction of “body” and “population” in a way that makes it subject to two different disciplinary fields. His and other studies have demonstrated clearly that there is no such thing as “sexual essentialism”: sexuality is not biologically given but is a historically constructed human product (Butler 1990). As with other aspects of human behavior and institutions, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbued with conflicts of interest and political maneuvering (Rubin 1984:267). This means that we have to take into account that the category of gender interacts with others like ethnicity, nationality, or age and that these categories and their intersections are important factors for any understanding of contemporary sex industries and the positioning of women in sex industries.

Based on these three different theoretical strands (migration theory, feminist analysis of migration processes, critical studies about sex work asking for power relations), this study investigates how migration and the commercial selling of sexuality are interrelated in terms of power relations and how this affects the cabaret dancers and their transnational formations. On the other side, this article also follows ideas that see migrant sex workers as equipped with *agency* (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and the capacity for *reflexivity* (Giddens 1985): They are active subjects that are not completely submitted to structural constraints, but they have some margins where they can maneuver and develop own life strategies. In other words, cabaret dancers are not only victims (of patriarchal or socioeconomic structures) but also actors in globalization processes. The aim of the article is not to investigate the transnational way of being of cabaret dancers in the theoretical perspective of “deviance and criminology” but to highlight the conditions of their work and their strategies in dealing with them. Having said this, we can now discuss more in detail the transnationality literature what is important to be able to understand the transnational formation of the dancers.

2.2. Two ideal-type ideas of transnationality

Since the early 1990s, studies on transnationalism have proliferated, and transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding the contemporary practices taking place across national borders. Ideally, we can distinguish between two different schools¹. On the one hand, we have a series of authors theorizing the complexity of transnational processes, focusing on *established* migrants settled in the host countries. They try to understand the rules behind the development, continuation, and specific morphology of the long- or short-term transnational fields linking the migrants with their countries of origin or with third countries. They are interested in the social space that arises between different countries and are transnational in nature (among others Dahinden 2005 ; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; Vertovec 1999). These works could be classified as the *sedentarized transnationality school*: Social scientists deal with migrants who are wage earners in the Fordist sense as employees of local firms or migrants who are ethnic entrepreneurs. These migrants participate in transnationalism by exploiting social capital (Bourdieu 1980) based on the principle of ethnic and/or family solidarity and mutual support. This type of migrant constructs transnational political, economic, or social fields between the host country and the country of origin (and/or third countries). They send

¹ School might be a strong word for these two theoretical approaches: It shall only be understood as an approximation insofar as it serves to highlight the main features of these two ideal types.

remittances home, create ethnic businesses in the transnational space, join political associations, and are involved in long-distance-nationalist projects, or receive visits from cultural groups from the home country to maintain their specific collective identity, etc. Often, this dispersed, sedentarized migrants are characterized by some sort of (symbolic or physical) “homeland orientation” and by the maintenance of their ethnic boundaries (in the sense of Barth 1969), thus preserving a distinctive identity *vis-à-vis* the host society and being involved in ethnic or national community building.

There is a second, very different school – represented mainly by French anthropologists and representatives of “the new mobility paradigm” (Urry 2007) – which I shall call here *transnationality through mobility*. In this case, the focus of research is no longer the long-term, settled migrant in the Georg Simmel tradition (1908) – “The stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow” – but a constant and continuous form of circular mobility. The central element in the work of this set of authors is that they choose as a central theme mobility that has become an integral part of the migrants’ strategy. This type of migrant does not leave their country with the aim of settling in another country, they tend to stay mobile to maintain or improve their quality of life. One may think here, first of all, of highly skilled people, executives, international officials, managers in multinational companies, who move frequently, a transnational elite who incorporates globalization (Sklair 2001). But this type of mobility is also widespread among people who are not by any means highly skilled and do not hold highly skilled jobs. Alain Tarrus (2002, 1993), for example, speaks of the new nomads who by creating circular territories, can at one and the same time belong here and there, there and here. He describes how Algerians contribute to a very thriving economic exchange between Marseille, Belgium, Italy, and Spain involving a wide variety of goods, notably household electrical appliances or electronic equipment. They are not diasporic or ethnic entrepreneurs in the sense of the first form of transnationalism, but nomadic entrepreneurs. They are not aiming for success away from their native town, nor do they want to settle in France, Italy, Switzerland, or anywhere else. Mobility is precisely the capital that is needed for transnationalism of this kind to develop. Practices of “shuttle migration” described by Morokvasic (2003) for Polish women, or “suitcase trading” (commerce à valise) by Tunisian (Schmoll 2005) or Moroccan women (Peraldi 2007) follow the same principle. It is a commercial activity that basically depends on the women’s mobility know-how and physical movement: Moroccan women cross the Ceuta enclave to Morocco to sell garments made in China; they also carry cosmetics, household goods, and food items; and they sell them elsewhere. The distinctive thing about this model of transnationality is the importance of the mobility capital of the people involved and the different make-up of their social capital. These suitcase traders do not aspire to be integrated as wage earners in western cultural models and are not migrants in the Fordist sense of the term. Moreover, their social capital is not based on strong or diasporic relations but on “weak” relations (Granovetter 1973): trust and solidarity are built up with friends and acquaintances and not so much with close relatives.

In sum, whereas mobility – understood as the more or less continuous movement of the migrants – is mostly absent in the first ideal type, as the sedentarized character is the main focus, the different settlement practices are often neglected in the second ideal type. It is obvious that the various authors in these two schools have included some elements of the other in their work; however, my argument is that this has not been done in a systematic way. Furthermore, I maintain that cabaret dancers are part of the *transnationality through mobility* type: However, to be able to circulate, they need to develop some “sedentarizing” elements in their transnational way of being. Only by building up local bridges – by “localizing” – with different actors in Switzerland, they are able to continue to move.

3. THE STUDY DESIGN

This article is based on a study conducted in Switzerland in 2005 when we were interested in the working and living conditions of cabaret dancers in Switzerland. We use two types of data source: first, we conducted 30 interviews with key persons from the federal and cantonal authorities, employment agencies, advisory bodies, and night club owners in Switzerland. In these expert interviews we tried, on the one hand, to approach the legal situation and authorization practices with regard to cabaret dancers and, on the other, to shed light on their working and living conditions from different perspectives.

Second and more important, we approached the subjects' view of their own working conditions and biographies by means of 70 interviews with cabaret dancers. As sex work is still taboo and the dancers often find themselves in a dilemma between exploitation and their own economic interests, research in this field poses some specific methodological challenges (see for instance Shaver 2005). Working in the sex industry is often a stigma *per se*, which enhances for instance the risk of "socially desirable responding" (Meston 1998; Paulhus 2002).

As we had to rely partially on external interviewers – who had access to the cabaret dancers or spoke their languages – unstructured interview techniques were not seriously considered, because it would have been difficult to ensure similar approaches and comparable levels of gathered information. We therefore opted for interviews based on a semi-standardized questionnaire and written guidelines of questionnaire utilization, which were discussed during collective and individual interview training. The questionnaire consisted of closed as well as of open questions that were translated into the main languages of the dancers. These interviews were mainly conducted in their respective mother tongues (German, English, French, Russian, Rumanian, or Spanish).

In the interviews, we were not only interested in the work of the cabaret dancers in Switzerland, but also in their decision-making processes in coming to Switzerland as dancers, in their life trajectories in general, as well as in their future plans.

We used first snowball sampling, because at first it seemed the best possible way to get access to this population. But it turned out that this sampling strategy did not work; only 6 out of the 70 dancers were contacted through this method. That is why we opted for targeted sampling by cooperating with gatekeepers who contacted potential interview partners on their behalf. A difficulty of working with gatekeepers concerns the limitations of their contacts. Thus, relying on only one gatekeeper to form a sample will most probably result in highly biased data. The solution to this problem was the diversification of the gatekeepers. In all, we used seven channels: nightclub owners, women's organizations, placement agencies, local administration, interviewers, other interview partners, and private persons.

The dancers interviewed came from 11 different countries, a large proportion (49 women) were from Eastern Europe, 14 from Latin America, 5 from Asia, and one from Europe.

4. UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSNATIONAL FORMATION OF CABARET DANCERS

When analyzing the transnational formations of cabaret dancers, we can identify different aspects that rely on mobility. Two main elements can be highlighted that enhance the circulation aspects: the transnational nature of the sex industry and the legal situation of the cabaret dancers in Switzerland turn them into a highly mobile migrant population with a specific transnational

morphology. On the other side, we can depict different factors that are serious barriers to the transnational mobility of the dancers, most of them are related to their precarious situation in Switzerland.

4.1. Becoming a transnational actor in the transnational sex industry

How do the dancers arrive in a cabaret in Switzerland and what is their motivation behind becoming mobile and coming to dance in a night club? Let us listen to two voices: A Russian dancer explained:

“I was living with my mother not far from St Petersburg. We had a tiny apartment. My mother has a small pension. I finished university and I couldn’t find a decent job. I had done a bit of arts school, so I can dance and I decided to go away somewhere as a dancer. I had the choice between being a market vendor with a higher degree or earning more by dancing, even if this job isn’t any better than the other.”

This quote is quite typical as the reasons that motivate the dancers to become mobile are without exception economic: all the women interviewed aspired for a better economic situation. Those who had work in their country of origin – 80% of the dancers had been integrated into the labor market before leaving their home country for the first time – said they did not have enough money to meet their needs, or they wanted to earn more money to assure their future, perhaps buy a house, set up a business, or continue their education. It should be noted, however, that only women from Eastern Europe mentioned further studies as a reason for migrating. The life situations of these women differ considerably depending on where they come from. In contrast to the dancers from Latin America and Thailand, the dancers from Eastern Europe have an above-average level of education (some even have a university degree). In the countries of the former communist bloc, the State systematically promoted the inclusion of women in the labor market. Women’s access to training and education and their insertion in the labor market was a strategy dictated by the policy of expansion pursued by those countries, and these efforts did lead to a high presence of women in the labor market. But everything changed with the transition to a market economy: in the restructuring process that followed the dismantling of the socialist economies, women were the first to lose their jobs. Today, the chances of finding a job matching their qualifications are very slight, and labor market conditions are particularly difficult for women. We find women with postgraduate degrees working as secretaries, dressmakers, saleswomen, or in the tertiary sector. In describing their financial problems, many of the women interviewed referred directly to the processes set on foot by perestroika. It is also interesting to note that most of the east European women working in cabarets in Switzerland come from a middle-class background, i.e., from families with a high cultural capital. One Russian woman told us:

“I got my first primary teacher’s diploma when I was 22. But even with a diploma like that, you earn next to nothing. Dancing was my hobby and I had already danced in a bar in Ukraine. But I wanted to earn more money. Sometimes I worked as an interpreter. My father is a teacher and my mother is an engineer in an electronics company. My parents get by financially, but they only earn just enough to live on.”

These women's economic aspirations can be put in practice and implemented thanks to transnational networks and people already in the transnational system of the sex industry. The women who come to work as night club dancers in Switzerland are mainly recruited by friends or acquaintances who already have some experience in the sex industry.² They play an important role as go-betweens with the agencies that find jobs for the dancers in Switzerland, obtain the necessary papers, and contact the cabarets. One dancer from the Ukraine shared:

"A friend of my cousin who had worked as a dancer in Switzerland gave us the telephone number of an agency there. We phoned, and the man asked us to send some photos and an email address where we could be contacted."

In fact, we are dealing here with chain migration (Fawcett 1989; Massey et al. 1993) or chain mobility, although it differs from other traditional chain migrations – e.g., the guest workers in Switzerland – in that we have one more "chain" than normal: the contact between the dancer and the agency is made by an acquaintance. The contact between the employers and the future migrants is made by placement agencies and not by friends or acquaintances, as is the case with other groups of "guest workers." It should be noted that the dancers' relations with the people who form the "chain," who put them in contact with the agencies, can be described as "weak" in the sense of Granovetter (1973): they are not close friends or family but passing acquaintances, and the women have not invested anything in terms of time or emotion in these relations. It seems quite understandable that this part of the "chain" is not formed by close friends or family, for the simple reason that working in the sex industry is taboo and most of the dancers told us that they did not tell their families what their work in the cabarets involved.

The other "chain," the agencies, operate either in the dancers' country of origin or in Switzerland, and sometimes cooperate among themselves. They are themselves transnational players and they set up networks that in some cases are worldwide.³ Here no dancer is directly engaged by a cabaret: The cabarets cooperate with agencies who present them with photos and short descriptions of the potential dancers. The cabaret owners choose the women, and it is the agencies that arrange the papers and contracts, also taking care of the visas for the women.

In this way, through acquaintances and agencies, the dancers are integrated into the sex industry, which is on the whole strongly transnational in character, and in different respects. First, as already mentioned, the placement agents are in a transnational network of night clubs (and maybe other products of the sex industry) placing the women in different countries. The fact that the sex market is transnational explains why some of the dancers have become transnational players on mobility. A good third of the women interviewed had already worked as dancers in another country – many in Japan, others in Lebanon, South Korea, Bulgaria, Italy, or Australia.

Second, some of the women told us they had already been working in the sex business in their own countries. In these cases, the local sex industry – where we often find sex tourists from Western countries, as is the case for women from Thailand – served as a launch pad for the transnational sex market. The story of one woman from Latvia illustrates this kind of situation:

² Of all the interviewed women, only 6 persons have been informed about the possibility of working as a dancer in Switzerland by way of newspapers or Internet; all others mentioned social relations.

³ It should be mentioned that these recruitment processes make the women vulnerable to the danger of exploitation: the women often have to pay huge sums of money for the agencies' services especially the first time they come to Switzerland to be a dancer. This places them in a situation of dependence where they can easily be pressured.

“After 12 years of schooling I did a four-year training course to become a child psychiatrist. Perestroika brought a political and economic crisis. At that time, I was living with my parents and my brother. Both my parents had lost their jobs, and my brother had fainted several times from sheer hunger, so I decided to work as a prostitute in Riga, where I could earn enough money with the tourists.”

But there is another aspect that deserves attention and that sheds a different light on this transnational character of the sex industry: sex is not the only thing the dancers sell; they also sell it in part because of their ethnicity or “race.” The category of gender combines with that of ethnicity to make these women seem “exotic”, and questions of “otherness” come into play. Asked why cabaret owners prefer to employ only women from outside (western) Europe, one owner told us that this corresponded to customer demand for exotic women. Representations of gender, which are social and cultural constructs, are thus closely linked with representations that construct an exotic “other,” a process that has its deeper roots in the colonial world. This phenomenon of exoticization is reflected in the sex industries in the countries of the North. There is a clear hierarchy among the sex workers that runs along ethnic lines: the more a woman is “racially” construed as “other,” the lower her status will be among the sex workers (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). In this respect, nightclub owners mentioned that there was a specific demand for women from Eastern Europe because they are well educated, tall, and blonde. They are thus regarded as the “upper class” among sex workers, which reflects a specific process of racialization. We might speak of a “symbolic transnational character” as we are dealing here with ethnicized or racialized gender representations that are dispersed globally.

In sum, the economic aspirations of the dancers, as well as a demand for “exotic” women, make the dancers mobile. Their “staying mobile” is enhanced by the conditions of a “dancer’s permit”, the transnational nature of the sex industry in general, and the transnational action radius of the placement agencies, in particular.

4.2. The dancers’ working conditions and legal regulations in Switzerland: wage-earning migrants constantly on the move

The situation of cabaret dancers has been of concern to the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with women, aid agencies, and the media for the past 20 years.⁴ Attention has been called to the precarious nature of the working and living conditions of these dancers – principally by NGOs and politicians – and this has led to many legal and administrative changes at federal and cantonal level, aimed at stricter regulation of activities in this field. Accordingly, there exists nowadays a specific short-term residence permit (L permit), commonly known as a “dancer’s permit”⁵. At present, this permit is granted for 8 months a year at most, after which the dancers have to leave Switzerland for 4 months before they can come back

⁴ While many different words exist in everyday usage to describe the work done in night clubs – go-go-girls, striptease dancers, etc. – the Swiss law defines the dancers as being “*persons (who) present an item as part of a musical show during which – to a musical accompaniment – they undress themselves partly or completely*” (Directives of the ordinance limiting the number of foreigners OLE, Annex 4/8c, fig. 1.2). To give a more exact ideal of the scale of the phenomenon, there were 1531 dancers with a short-stay permit in Switzerland in December 2006, and in 2004, 5953 dancers were recorded entering the country (Federal Office of Statistics 2005).

⁵ For a description and discussion of the legal bases, see Mock (2003).

to work in a cabaret. Often the women come to Switzerland for several years and go back home, or elsewhere, for a few months. Under the law currently in force, the permit for cabaret dancers is the only permit not dependent on civil status and is issued to unskilled women from non-European countries wishing to work in Switzerland. A short-term “dancer’s” residence permit is granted to cabaret dancers aged 20 or above. A dancer cannot change her field of activity: she is only entitled to work as a dancer in bars and nightclubs, etc. With a view to providing better protection for the dancers – after various cases of exploitation were publicly exposed, forcing the authorities to act – a number of measures have been introduced in recent years. Now the employment and residence conditions for cabaret dancers are laid down in detail. Professional services, for instance, the nature of their activities, gross monthly wages, and social deductions are precisely set out in a model work contract. This explicitly stipulates that the dancers are not allowed to incite customers to consume alcohol, or to offer them sexual services. Prostitution and other economic-sexual relations are thus prohibited.⁶ All additional charges agreed with the employer – e.g., relating to board and lodging, travel expenses between home and place of work – must appear in the contract. As regards the minimum wage, the itemized breakdown and payment of the wages are included in this basic contract to prevent inadmissible deductions. The cabarets are also bound by various regulations concerning the stage or the area of the dance surface. Lastly, no permits will be issued for establishments that provide separate rooms⁷ to which clients and dancers can withdraw.

This type of permit is thus linked to a high degree of mobility among these women; indeed, it actually forces them to be constantly on the move as they have to leave Switzerland after 8 months at the latest. In addition to their global circulation, the women move every month to a different cabaret within Switzerland, since the contract tying them to one particular cabaret is generally for one month only. However, as we will see there is a discrepancy between the legal relations and the working reality of the dancers.

4.3. Discrepancy between working reality and legal bases: a burgeoning business sense?

Until now, we have presented arguments on how these women develop a transnational formation based on mobility. In this chapter, we shall look at an analysis of the *sedentarizing* elements in their transnationality. It reveals that to be able to circulate, the women need to include some elements of *sedentariness* into their transnational formations.

The legal regulations in force in Switzerland have, in effect, turned cabaret dancers into traditional wage-earning migrants as they have a binding labor contract. Unlike the typical migrants of the mobile transnationality type, like suitcase traders or male nomadic entrepreneurs, the dancers do not work in the informal economy but in a highly regulated setting and they are not self-employed, but employed by a concrete employer. Dancers are not involved in the product market; they do not sell electronic equipment, cosmetics, clothes, or similar things, as is usually the case with the migrants in this school of thought: what they sell is their body, their sex, their ethnicized sexuality, and also conversation and a listening ear. We might therefore consider that their status as wage-earning migrants represents in itself an element of what I called *sedentarized transnationality*. The

⁶ In Switzerland prostitution is not prohibited as such, but it is forbidden for dancers.

⁷ These are areas separated from the rest of the cabaret by thick curtains to permit intimacy between a dancer and a client and are used for sexual services. Although they are forbidden, separate rooms still exist in most cabarets.

dancers are bound by state regulations; this is normally not the case for freely circulating traders, but rather for sedentarized migrants. Their work situation represented in the model contract is similar to that of established migrants; some parts of the contract concern legal regulations all workers in Switzerland are subjected to. Thus, the situation of the dancers is in this way similar to that of the sedentarized migrants.

Still, notwithstanding the legal regulations we described, almost all the cabaret dancers engage, at least from time to time, in activities that do not appear in their work contract, or which are explicitly forbidden – they work on informal basis. They work longer hours and more often than is allowed in their contract; they encourage customers to drink alcohol, chiefly champagne, as they are often given a percentage of the café-owner's margin on alcohol sales⁸: and they offer sexual services both during working hours and in their free time. The dancers thus find themselves in a legal vacuum that places them beyond the reach of controls or legal protection and in the informal part of the economy, similar to the suitcase traders or the nomadic entrepreneurs. But this is where these women's economic motivations are reflected. For in fact, these activities are undertaken to some extent on their own initiative, which shows the economic nature of their mobility and their mercantile spirit: the dancers make financial gains through the additional services they offer illegally. Thanks to these services they earn an extra CHF 1,000 a month on average (approximately € 600). One Russian woman told us: *“Sexual services are our main source for earning money. It wouldn't be worth coming here for the wages we get.”*

Although some of the dancers' activities can be classed as prostitution, they do not see themselves as prostitutes and so avoid taking on an identity as such. Many women say that some of their clients have become good friends. *“I keep them company before or after work, and sometimes we may have sex,”* one Bulgarian woman admitted. *“But I don't ask them to pay me for that, just to give me money for the phone or presents and food.”* These testimonies are a reminder of the continuum in commercial-sexual exchanges between men and women, which is a recurring feature in social organization (Pheterson 2001). Here, the women testify to different activities that could be placed on this continuum. It is interesting to note, as Ljuslin (2007) has shown, that on the one hand, the dancers have developed strategies of comparison based on principles of hierarchy to differentiate themselves from women working in the sex industry as street prostitutes or in massage parlors. They recognize that, in general, part of their work does consist in engaging in sex against payment, but they consider it as very different from what they imagine happens in massage parlors or on the street: it can be refused, it is set in a context of social relations (conversation, flirting, regular visits), it takes place in a “classy” setting far removed from the sleazy, unhealthy conditions experienced by other (foreign) prostitutes; it is valued at its due worth. In line with their approach to sexual services, the dancers do not consider longer and more frequent working hours as negative *à priori*. *“It's in my own interest to work longer on occasion. When there are good clients it's worth my while to stay longer,”* a dancer from Latvia said.

One is tempted to say that these women are strategic economic and social players who are adept in managing a form of “opportunistic capitalism” on the outer edges of legality by selling their ethnicized sex.

⁸ Selling champagne to the clients is the main source of income for the cabarets. So it is in the interest of the cabaret owners to have the dancers incite customers to drink. Entrance to the cabaret is free of charge for clients, but if they want to talk to one of the dancers, they have to buy drinks. Champagne is thus intimately linked to the imaginary of a cabaret and to the economic survival of these enterprises.

But the story is more complicated than it may seem: some dancers perform these additional services because they are not fully aware of the services that are actually part of their job description, and they have only a vague idea of the rights and obligations contained in their work contract. It may be that they do not understand the contract because they do not speak the language in which it is written. The discrepancy between law and practice in the dancers' work may also be the result of coercion – whether it stems from outside pressures, or a situation of dependence or exploitation in connection with cabaret managers, placement agencies, or even clients. When this is the case, the dancers find themselves in an inextricable situation. They drink alcohol, for instance, because they do not want to run the risk of not having their contract renewed, champagne being the main source of income for the cabarets.

We could conclude by saying that these conditions are serious barriers to the mobility of these women. Most of the dancers are, so to speak, walking a tightrope from which they could easily fall. The precariousness of their situation is due both to the conditions attached to the “dancer” permit and to the context of sex work in general. However, it does not affect all the dancers in the same way. Some of them find themselves in a very difficult situation that may even result in coercion. This is particularly true for women who come to Switzerland for the first time. A considerable number of the dancers come to Switzerland just once and never come back. They move once, return, and then stop circulating.

But what are the conditions that enable others to profit from this situation of “opportunistic capitalism”? To be able to exploit these opportunities in the shadow of legality, the women must develop a whole series of vertical, locally anchored relations. These elements shall be discussed in the next paragraph.

4.4. Developing vertical, locally anchored networks to stay mobile: the “strength of weak ties”

Some women are able to exploit the uncertainties of the situation and achieve their economic ambitions. These are the women, who in the course of their stays in Switzerland, manage to build up a network of different actors, who in turn provide them with various contacts to help them increase their income and deal with the precarious nature of their situation. These dancers come back again and again to Switzerland and go to dance in other countries.

Who are the most important actors with whom the dancers form ties? First, the placement agencies should be mentioned: often the dancers hear from their colleagues – once they are dancing in a cabaret – which agencies are able to put them in a “good cabaret”⁹ and which do not demand exaggerated amounts for the placement services. Dancers often change their agency during the first stay in Switzerland according to the new information they receive. Second, the women accumulate detailed knowledge as to which cabarets are worth working for, and which ones are not: This means, they can evaluate which owners do behave correctly – in terms of payment of salary, no coercion, and so on – and which ones should be avoided. If the owner of a cabaret is satisfied with the work of a dancer, she can count on the person to give her another contract in a few months' time, which renders her situation less precarious. This way, some dancers can after a while choose – always in contact with their agencies – which cabarets they will

⁹ For a typology of the cabarets see Thiévent (2008).

work in. But also the clients are important actors in these new networks of “locality” in Switzerland: We have examples of how dancers form alliances with their clients to complain or to demand their rights in situations of exploitation. And finally, notwithstanding the strong competition between the dancers, these colleagues are important as they are a source of a different kind of information. Interestingly enough, these newly knotted relations are all weak or fugitive in nature: We know from network analysis that the “strength of weak ties,” as Granovetter (1973) said, lies in their potential for accessing information. Weak, fugitive, and so-called bridging ties are important with regard to information diffusion, while strong ties promise solidarity, reciprocity, and social support (for instance Flap and Völker 2004). This way the dancers create locally anchored social capital consisting of weak ties, giving them access to information that allows them to be able to stay mobile – they get to know where to earn most without taking risks. Put differently, they are kind of “sedentarized” while staying mobile.

5. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The cabaret dancers, who were the focus of this study, represent a heterogeneous group embodying a particular, contemporary form of female transnational mobility: The transnationality of the dancers is the result of the transnational nature of the sex industry, the women’s ability to form “weak” ties with a range of local actors, their own resourcefulness in terms of mobility, and the opportunity structure of the local context in Switzerland. In conclusion, we may say that the dancers’ working conditions are precarious in terms of the traditional sociology of work. This precariousness is due both to the conditions attached to the “dancer” permit and to the context of sex working in general. However, it does not affect all the dancers in the same way. Some of them find themselves in a very difficult situation that may even result in coercion. As the study has shown, this is particularly true for women who come to Switzerland for the first time. Other women manage to make the best of their situation. They are able to exploit the uncertainties of the situation and achieve their economic ambitions through their work as dancers and the different additional services they offer. Other women come to Switzerland only once and their mobility leaves them in debt.

But what kind of conclusions can we get out of this case study nourishing the transnationality debate? From this case study, it appears that transnational practices cannot develop separately but are linked to the constraints and opportunities imposed by the context. The contextual conditions that influence the emergence of transnational practices and the different forms of transnationalism depend on social, political, and legal factors and on gender power relations. Cultural, socioeconomic, and political constraints block certain possibilities for transnational action and foster others. This might be common-sense knowledge in transnational studies (see for instance Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001; Portes 2003) but I argue that the articulation of local, transnational, and global aspects stills needs more theoretical attention in future.

Furthermore, the case study shows that social networks are a key element in building up transnational practices: However, within migration research, the focus lies mainly on strong relations that are often limited to family and ethnic relations (critically see Gurak and Caces 1992). Such a theoretical focus might makes senses when investigating ethnic enclaves or family solidarity, but it is a serious shortcoming when analyzing transnational practices in a more general

way: In such and other contexts, weak and bridging ties as well as non-family and non-ethnic relations are of special relevance and can bring new theoretical insight in transnational processes. Another important point that has been brought to light in this example is the following: Although the research design has been de-ethnicized by analyzing a group whose boundaries are not defined in ethnic or national but in *professional* terms – responding hereby to critics of “methodological nationalism” (Beck 2002; Wimmer and Schiller 2002) and ‘groupism’ (Brubaker 2004)– ethnicity seemingly sneaks in through the backdoor again. First, the regulatory power of the *nation state* is formative for the situation of the dancers: the conditions of the “dancers permit” is not only a result of the (ethnicized) migration politic of the Swiss State, but at the same time is central for the formation of the specific transnationality of the dancers. Second, ethnicity is of high importance in this transnational imaginary of sexuality as it creates a demand for migrant sex workers. Thus, de-ethnicizing research designs does not mean ignoring ethnicity (or nationality) in the analysis of social phenomena but bringing to light its role.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agustin, Laura. 2006. The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32 (1):29-47.
- . 2007. *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*. London: Zed Books.
- Al-Ali, Nadje, Richard Black, and Khalid Koser. 2001. The Limits to 'Transnationalism': Bosnian and Eritrean Refugees in Europe as Emerging Transnational Communities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 24 (4):578-600.
- Anderson, Bridget, and Julia O'Connell Davidson. 2004. *Trafficking - a demand led problem?* Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. Introduction. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by F. Barth. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2002. *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter. Neue weltpolitische Ökonomie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. Le capital social. Notes provisoires. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 31:2-3.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. Ethnicity without Groups. In *Ethnicity without Groups*, edited by R. Brubaker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Chancer, Lynn Sharon. 1993. Prostitution, feminist theory, and ambivalence: notes from the sociological underground. *Social text* 37:143-171.
- Dahinden, Janine und Fabienne Stants (2006). *Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen von Cabaret-Tänzerinnen in der Schweiz. Studien SFM 48. Neuchâtel: Schweizerisches Forum für Migrations- und Bevölkerungsstudien*.
- Dahinden, Janine (2005). "Contesting transnationalism? Lessons from the study of Albanian migration networks from former Yugoslavia." *Global Networks. A journal of transnational affairs*, 5(2): 191-208.
- Donato, Katharine M, Dnna Gabaccia, Jennier Holdaway, Martin Manalansan, and Patricia R Pessar. 2006. A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies. *International Migration Review. Special Issue: Gender and Migration Revisted* 40:2-26.

- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. What is Agency? *The American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4):962-1023.
- Faist, Thomas. 2000. Transnationalization in International Migration: Implication for the study of Citizenship and Culture. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (2):189-222.
- Fawcett, James T. 1989. Networks, Linkages, and Migration Systems. *International Migration Review* 13 (2):671-80.
- Flap, Henk, and Beate Völker, eds. 2004. *Creation and Returns of Social Capital*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Der Wille zum Wissen. Sexualität und Wahrheit I*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- . 1978. *Dispositive der Macht. Über Sexualität, Wissen und Wahrheit*. Berlin: Merve Verlag.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1985. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6):1360-1380.
- Guarnizo, Luis E., Alejandro Portes, and William Haller. 2003. Assimilation and Transnationalism: Determinants of Transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants. *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (6):1211-48.
- Gurak, Douglas T., and Fe Caces. 1992. Migration Networks and the Shaping of Migration Systems. In *International Migration System: A Global Approach*, edited by M. M. Kritz, L. L. Lean and H. Zlotnik. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2002. Love and Gold. In *Global Woman : Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, edited by B. Ehrenreich and A. R. Hochschild. London: Granta Books.
- Kempadoo, Kamala, and Jo Doezema, eds. 1998. *Global Sex Workers. Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*. New York: Routledge.
- Kofman, Eleonore. 1999. Female 'Birds of Passage' a Decade Later: Gender and Immigration in the European Union. *International Migration Review* 33 (2):269-299.
- Levitt, Peggy, and Nadya B Jaworsky. 2007. Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (7):1-7.28.
- Ljuslin, Nathalie. 2007. *Permis L ou « elle » et prostitution: des rapports sociaux de domination et des tactiques de résistances des danseuses de cabaret*. Mémoire DIPLOME D'ETUDES APPROFONDIES (DEA) PLURIUNIVERSITAIRE, « ETUDES GENRE », Université de Lausanne et Université de Genève.
- Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and Edward L. Talyor. 1993. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19 (3):431-466.
- Meston, Cindy M., Heiman, Julia R., Trapnell, Paul D., Paulhus, Delroy L. 1998. Socially desirable responding and sexuality self-reports. *Journal of Sex Research* 35 (2):148-157.
- Mock, Hanspeter. 2003. La nouvelle loi sur les étrangers et les danseuses de cabaret: une bien curieuse exception au système binaire d'admission des étrangers. *AJP/PJA* 3:1370-1377.
- Morokvasic, Mirjana. 2003. Transnational Mobility and Gender: A View from Post-Wall Europe. In *Crossing Borders and Shifting Boundaries. Vol. I: Gender on the Move*, edited by M. Morokvasic, U. Erel and K. Shinozaki. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Ostergaard-Nielsen, Eva. 2003. The Politics of Migrant's Transnational Political Practices. *International Migration Review* 37 (3):760-786.

- Paulhus, Delroy L. 2002. Social Desirable Responding: The Evolution of a Construct. In *The role of constructs in psychological and educational measurement*, edited by H. I. J. Braun, D.N.; Wiley, D.E. Mahwah New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Peraldi, Michel. 2007. *Aventuriers du nouveau capitalisme marchand. Essai d'anthropologie de l'éthique mercantile*. Cycle de Conférence de la MAPS (Maison d'analyse des processus sociaux), Université de Neuchâtel, Suisse (manuscrit non publié).
- Pessar, Patricia, and Sarah J. Mahler. 2003. Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In. *International Migration Review* 37 (3):812-846.
- Pheterson, Gail. 2001. *Le prisme de la prostitution*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Portes, Alejandro. 2003. Conclusion: Theoretical Convergencies and Empirical Evidence in the Study of Immigrant Transnationalism. *International Migration Review* 37 (3):874-892.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1984. Thinking Sex: Notes for the a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by S. C. Vance. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Parel.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2003. The Feminization of Survival: Alternative Global Circuits. In *Crossing Borders and Shifting Boundaries. Vol. I: Gender on the Move*, edited by M. Morokvasic, U. Erel and K. Shinozaki. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Green Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. 1992. Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration. In *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered*, edited by N. G. Schiller, L. Basch and C. S. Blanc. New York: New York Academy of Science.
- Schmoll, Camille. 2005. Pratiques spatiales transnationales et stratégies de mobilité de commerçantes tunisiennes. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 25 (1):131-154.
- Shaver, Frances M. 2005. Sex Work Research. Methodological and Ethical Challenges. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (3):296-319.
- Simmel, Georg. 1908. *Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Sklair, Lesli. 2001. *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tarrius, Alain. 1993. Territoires Circulatoires et Espaces Urbaine. *Annales de la Recherche Urbain* 59-60.
- . 2002. *La mondialisation par le bas. Les nouveaux nomades de l'économie souterraine*. Paris: Balland.
- Thiévent, Romaric. 2008. Travail du sex et circulation: Le cas des danseuses de cabaret en Suisse. *Papier présenté lors du colloque '« Cache ce travail que je ne saurais voir ! » Ethnographier le travail du sexe, organisé par la MAPS, Université de Neuchâtel, 24 et 25 janvier 2008*.
- Thorbek, Susanne. 2002. Introduction. Prostitution in a Global Context: Changing Patterns. In *Transnational Prostitution. Changing Patterns in a Global Context*, edited by S. Thorbek and B. Pattanaik. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Vertovec, Steven. 1999. Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2):447-462.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. 2002. Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences. *Global Networks* 2 (4):301-334.